



**SCOTT
RABALAIS**
Time Out

Gunter more than a legend in her time

In a career as a sportswriter that is approaching two decades long, I couldn't possibly count the number of coaches and athletes I've covered.

Few, very few, have been legends in their respective sports. Eddie Robinson. Tiger Woods. Jeff Gordon. Skip Bertman. Shaquille O'Neal. Dale Brown.

None of them, though, spanned the entire history of their sport like Sue Gunter did.

There are legends, then there are matriarchs. That's what Sue Gunter was to women's basketball.

In a job where we are taught from the beginning to be impartial, to maintain distance, that was always hard to do with Gunter. She made it difficult with her humble charm, her self-deprecating manner, not to want to root for her. Not to want to get too close.

There were fights. She waged annual assaults for more coverage with me and my newspaper colleagues.

Her argument: cover my team more and more people will come watch us play. Our response:

once more people come to watch you play we will cover your team more.

In the end, that's just how it happened. And on that February afternoon in 2003 when Tennessee came to town and fans filled the stands, the aisles, and some were turned away from the Pete Maravich Assembly Center, I was happier for Gunter than anyone I've ever covered.

I never would have believed it, but finally the little program that could filled the PMAC. After years of literally not being able to give tickets away, it was Gunter's greatest triumph.

Mostly, though, Sue Gunter's career made me angry, much angrier than I ever got when she complained about the lack of coverage. Gunter's career was a study in almosts and what might

When she was assistant coach on the first U.S. Olympic women's basketball team in 1976, she missed the opening ceremony and first game because her father died.

When she was the Olympic head coach in 1980, there was no Olympics for Team USA because of Jimmy Carter's boycott.

When her LSU team finally reached the Final Four, in New Orleans no less, she wasn't on the bench because she didn't want to be in the way.

When she goes into the Basketball Hall of Fame next month, there will be an empty chair.

Gunter never expressed anger or more than passing frustration over such things.

So she was denied a career achievement here, a moment in the sun there? She focused on her devotion to the women's game, finally blossoming as Gunter could only have imagined when playing halfcourt basketball decades ago. She focused on her players, her kids.

She loved them all. And they loved her right back. How else could you explain more than two dozen former players and ad-

ministrators from Stephen F. Austin, a school she last coached at in 1980, showing up at LSU last August for a banquet in Gunter's honor.

"That to me was significant," LSU men's basketball coach John Brady said. "They probably don't remember some of the games she won or lost but certainly they remembered the relationship."

The last time I saw Gunter was last year at the news conference to announce her retirement and Pokey Chatman's hiring as her successor.

Oxygen tubes and all, Sue refused to be sad. She was too happy for Chatman, perhaps her all-time favorite, for that.

"I'll be around," Gunter said, feisty matriarch to the end.

The fight is finished. But, yes, she's still around.

SUE GUNTER: 1939-2005



Sue Gunter cut down the net after her LSU women's basketball team beat Tennessee 78-62 for the 2003 Southeastern Conference tournament title. Advocate file photo

Lady Tigers family reacts with sadness

BY ROBIN FAMBROUGH
Advocate sportswriter

Word that legendary LSU women's basketball coach Sue Gunter had died Thursday morning spread quickly to current and former Lady Tigers players.

Whether they learned through a mass e-mail sent out by the LSU women's basketball office or through a phone call, the reaction was both immediate and emotional.

Current LSU player Scholanda Hoston was so emotional that she asked to delay doing a telephone interview.

Gunter, 66, spent 22 years as head coach at LSU. She was remembered

by her former players from a variety of eras, including her 12-year stint at Stephen F. Austin. The Walnut Grove, Miss., native began her coaching career at Middle Tennessee.

"It's been an extremely tough day," LSU assistant coach Bob Starkey said. "We were at her (Gunter's home) and then we came in and started contacting people."

"In terms of former players, when you think about it, there were so many ... more than 100 at LSU. Naturally, she was closer to some than to others. We sent out a mass e-mail

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Advocate staff photo by TRAVIS SPRADLING

Sue Gunter, right, stopped by practice to watch coach Pokey Chatman and the Lady Tigers prepare for a 2004 NCAA tournament game.

Gunter was an inspiration to friends, colleagues

BY RANDY ROSETTA

Advocate sportswriter

There was always one thing Tommy Goodson could count on when he talked to Sue Gunter, something he always looked forward to.

"She had that great laugh, a big ol' hearty laugh," Goodson said Thursday. "That's something I'm really going to miss."

Like hundreds of other coaches and friends, a good portion of Good-

son's Thursday was spent reflecting on the impact Gunter had in 40 years as a coach.

The long-time LSU women's basketball coach died Thursday morning following a long battle with emphysema.

As influential as Gunter was as a coach, the common theme Thursday was that her impact as a person was even more meaningful.

"The thing about Sue is that I nev-

er met anybody who didn't like her, and we're talking about a lady who was in one of the most intense professions in one of the most competitive conferences in the country," said Goodson, an LSU assistant to Gunter for 14 seasons. "Nobody was her enemy. She was very good about making people feel good about themselves."

That was a talent Gunter used to endear herself to her fellow coaches

at LSU.

Skip Bertman arrived at LSU early in Gunter's tenure, and the two quickly established a solid bond as low-profile coaches with dreams of building something big.

By the time Gunter resigned for health reasons in 2004, Bertman was the LSU athletics director, but more important, a close friend.

"I've watched her touch people, coach people, teach and inspire peo-

ple and make a difference in a lot of lives," Bertman said. "She did for women's college basketball what Arnold Palmer did for golf and Muhammad Ali did for boxing. She raised the awareness of her sport as much as anybody else who coached before her or since."

Gunter, who was one of the world's top amateur players in the 1950s and

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SUE GUNTER: 1939-2005



Sue Gunter, right, is hugged by former player Latasha Dorsey after LSU was named the fourth seed in the NCAA West Regional in 1999. Advocate staff photo by BILL FEIG

INSPIRATION

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'60s, arrived at LSU with a spectacular résumé already in hand. In 16 seasons at Stephen F. Austin University in Texas, she rolled up a 266-87 record and put teams on the floor that regularly challenged for the national championship before women's basketball was a major attraction.

Deemed a pioneer of the women's game by her peers, Gunter wasn't fazed when she moved from the Piney Woods of Nacogdoches, Texas, to Baton Rouge in the early 1980s. In 22 years at LSU, Gunter went 442-221 and established a program that now challenges Tennessee for supremacy in the powerful Southeastern Conference.

Goodson was along for the ride during most of the early years of Gunter's LSU tenure. He said she remained resolute in her goals from the time she arrived, through some lean years in the early 1990s, and again when the Lady Tigers started fulfilling the lofty goals Gunter had privately set and shared with Goodson when he joined her staff.

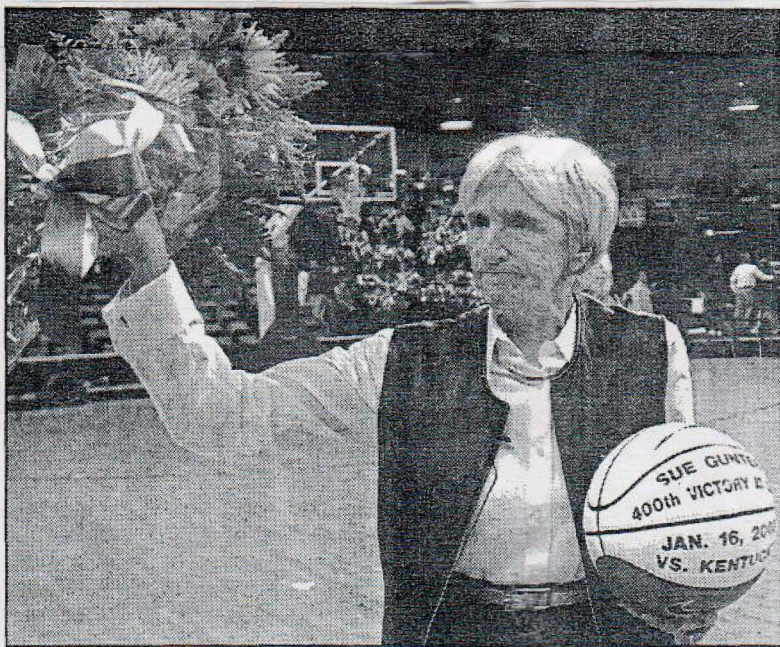
"She told me almost from the first day she hired me that she thought LSU could be a great women's program," Goodson said. "She told me we could fill the arena and be in the Final Four and do all kinds of big things. I thought to myself, 'What is she thinking?'"

"But she was right in the end, and she never wanted to take the credit for what she built. She gave all the credit to her players and the assistants. She never said anything when people started showing up at games and filled the (Pete Maravich Assembly Center), but I knew she had to be proud. She had every right to be."

Gunter was right. In 2003 when No. 6-ranked LSU and No. 3 Tennessee played in the PMAC, an overflow crowd of nearly 15,000 prompted the fire marshal to step in and regulate the throng.

"Sue had tears in her eyes that day," Bertman said. "That was always something she dreamed about and it came true that day."

Likewise, when the Lady Tigers reached the Final Four for the first time in 2004, Gunter's prophetic



Advocate staff photo by BILL FEIG

Sue Gunter celebrated her 400th victory as LSU women's basketball coach on Jan. 16, 2000, against Kentucky.

words came true again.

But when her emphysema forced Gunter to take a background role early in the SEC season and her longtime protégé Pokey Chatman took over as the head coach, Gunter made a point to remain in the background.

With the Final Four right down the road in New Orleans, Gunter attended but chose to stay in her hotel room and watch the LSU-Tennessee national semifinal game on television instead of in person.

As proud as the architect was of the program she had re-built, she didn't want to steal the thunder from Chatman. The irony was that Chatman taking over also made it easier for Gunter to let go.

"I know it hurt Sue to not be there because she had worked so hard to make it happen," Goodson said. "But if there was such a thing as easing the pain a little bit, that's what having Pokey there in the middle of it did. I think it was a lot easier for Sue to have one of her own coaching the team if she couldn't be there."

Added Bertman, "Sue didn't want to make the Final Four all about her, a 'Win one for the Gipper' thing. She stayed away from the arena for that reason — because she wanted the moment to belong to the players and

Pokey and not become a farewell to Sue Gunter. She was very large inside, a person with a great heart and great humility."

Humble enough to easily mesh with the different coaching personalities she encountered throughout her LSU career.

Besides Bertman's confident swaggering style, Gunter also shared the LSU fan base with Dale Brown's revival-tent preacher persona for 14 years. Then when Brown retired in 1997, Gunter had to shift gears and adjust to a relatively unknown newcomer charged with maneuvering the LSU men's program through a rugged stretch of NCAA probation.

Turned out Gunter could get along with whoever she was asked to share the spotlight with.

"When I came here as head coach, she totally embraced me, supported me, worked with me and (her) staff worked with my staff," said current Tigers' coach John Brady, who like Gunter, grew up in Mississippi.

"There are some situations in college basketball where the men's and women's programs don't get along, don't even speak. But the way Sue embraced me and our staff — we had a great working relationship. I always appreciated her for not

SUE GUNTER'S COACHING RECORD

Year	W	L	Pct.	School
1968-69	6	4	.600	S.F. Austin
1969-70	12	2	.857	S.F. Austin
1970-71	19	9	.697	S.F. Austin
1971-72	19	7	.731	S.F. Austin
1972-73	21	6	.778	S.F. Austin
1973-74	27	7	.794	S.F. Austin
1974-75	32	8	.800	S.F. Austin
1975-76	20	13	.606	S.F. Austin
1976-77	28	6	.824	S.F. Austin
1977-78	25	14	.641	S.F. Austin
1978-79	30	5	.857	S.F. Austin
1979-80	27	6	.818	S.F. Austin
1982-83	20	7	.741	LSU
1983-84	23	7	.767	LSU
1984-85	20	9	.690	LSU
1985-86	27	6	.818	LSU
1986-87	20	8	.714	LSU
1987-88	18	11	.620	LSU
1988-89	19	11	.633	LSU
1989-90	21	9	.700	LSU
1990-91	24	7	.774	LSU
1991-92	16	13	.552	LSU
1992-93	9	18	.333	LSU
1993-94	11	16	.407	LSU
1994-95	7	20	.259	LSU
1995-96	21	11	.656	LSU
1996-97	25	5	.833	LSU
1997-98	19	13	.593	LSU
1998-99	22	8	.733	LSU
1999-00	25	7	.781	LSU
2000-01	20	11	.645	LSU
2001-02	18	12	.600	LSU
2002-03	30	4	.882	LSU
2003-04	27	8	.771	LSU
Overall	708	308	.697	40 seasons*
SFA	266	87	.754	12 seasons
LSU	442	221	.667	22 seasons

*Note: Gunter's career is correctly listed as 40 years, but the NCAA does not recognize two years at Middle Tennessee State and her first four at Stephen F. Austin because of a lack of accurately kept results.

treating me any differently than she did coach Brown."

Goodson spoke of Gunter always asking about his wife and family first, not about where the next recruiting trip might be.

Brady presented Gunter last month for her induction into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, delivering an emotional tribute. Brady learned he was presenting her at the last minute because Chatman and Bertman were unable to attend the ceremony.

"I was as nervous as I've ever been because I wanted to do right by Sue in what I said," Brady said. "I referred to her as a legendary coach, but when all the wins and losses are totaled, the thing that will be talked about is that she was also a legend as a human being and person."

"I feel I'm a better human being and person for being around Sue Gunter and working with her. That's what most people felt after they met Sue."

"She didn't get into the coaching profession with a silver spoon in her mouth like a lot of other people did. She had to fight her way up through the



small college level, and she did that by doing whatever she needed to do to be successful. A big part of that was her personality. She could walk into a room and make anybody feel important. She's touched a lot of lives and a lot of people.

GARY BLAIR,
Texas A&M women's coach

"We've lost one of our superstars. Sue was fun-loving and she coached hard during the game, but



afterward she was just like your sister. When her team got to the Final Four (in 2004), she might've acted like it wasn't a big deal, but it was.

It was for all of us in the coaching profession because of the gracious manner she carried herself and the way she always treated people."

LEON BARMORE,
Former Louisiana Tech women's coach

"She knew how to be your friend. She was genuine. ... On the floor she was



such a great competitor. She would get as mad as an old sitting hen in a heartbeat. Every time you played a team of hers, you knew they were going to play hard and be competitive."

ANDY LANDERS,
Georgia women's coach

"I loved her. There was always a lot of respect, not just as a coach, but in life. She was an



unbelievable friend and sister. I will always cherish what we had."

ANN MEYERS
ESPN analyst and Basketball Hall of Famer

"A lot of the things you see today in the game of women's basketball are due to a large price earlier paid by people such as Sue Gunter. She will really be missed in our game."



MARSHA SHARP
Texas Tech women's coach

"Definitely one of the pioneers of women's collegiate basketball.

She was one of my mentors. ...

She made playing basketball fun due to her ability to connect with her players.

Personally, I am going to miss her tremendously and I know the game is going to miss her."



PAT SUMMITT,

Tennessee women's coach

"It's a sad day for women's basketball. ... She was just

such a wonderful person, a great personality, always

friendly. Whenever she saw me she always asked about my parents and that meant so much to me. She was a great person for our game from the time she played it until the last game she coached. She was just a wonderful human being."



NELL FORTNER,

Auburn women's coach

"Just sadness, that was my first thought. The coaching profession has lost a great one today. No question



she is one of the pioneers. She's a legend in the women's game."

KIM MULKEY-ROBERTSON

Baylor women's coach

"I am very saddened today. Sue's passing is a great loss for our sport and a personal



loss of a close friend. My thoughts are with Sue's family and those at LSU at this sad time."

JODY CONRADT,

Texas women's coach

SADNESS

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Carla (Berry, assistant coach) and I started calling former and current players."

Houston was one of the few current LSU players in Baton Rouge for the summer. Two prominent players, Baton Rouge native Seimone Augustus and post player Sylvia Fowles, are part the World University Games team that will represent the United States in Izmir, Turkey.

Augustus and Fowles leave today for Turkey. LSU coach Pokey Chatman, an assistant coach on the U.S. squad, returned to Baton Rouge on Thursday to help make funeral arrangements.

"I am who I am in no small part because of the role she has played in my life — both as a coach and as a person," Chatman said in a university news release. "I feel a great sense of responsibility to carry on her legacy at LSU. In one way I lost someone very special today — but in a more important way I know she will always be a part of me."

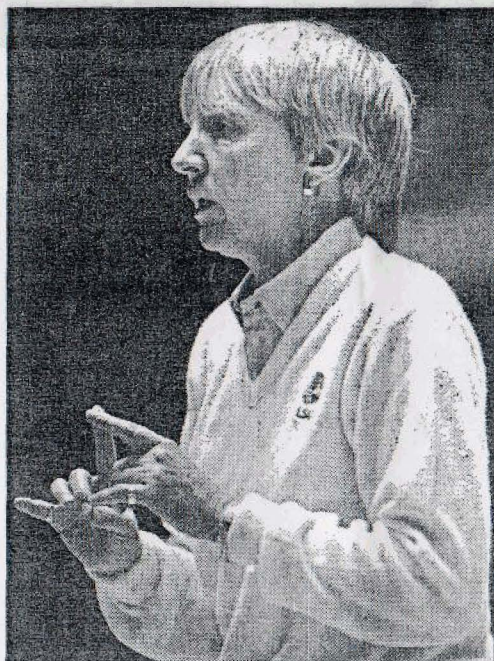
Others described their former coach as a true friend and mentor.

Gunter, who suffered from emphysema, resigned because of health reasons in April 2004. She missed much of the 2003-2004 season because of illness.

"I was expecting it, but you never want that day to come," Kisha James said. "I'm glad it's finally over. She was miserable. I know she's in a better place now."

"That was the love of my life. She (Gunter) was like a second mother to me. She was like my mother away from home."

James, who played from 1999-2003, works as an insurance agent locally. One of her first



Advocate file photo

Sue Gunter finished with 442 wins as LSU head coach and 708 overall.

calls was to Ke-Ke Tardy, a Lady Tiger from 2000-03. A law student, Tardy had returned home to visit relatives in Jackson, Miss.

"I think everybody suspected it would happen, but I didn't think it would happen this quick," Tardy said. "I think I always had the perception that coach Gunter would always be here."

"She passed along so much knowledge and her life experience to us. I don't think she'll ever be forgotten."

Another former player, Monroe native Keia Howell (1994-98), is helping make sure that

Gunter is never forgotten. In conjunction with the LSU women's basketball office, Howell is contacting other former players to fund a tribute wall dedicated to Gunter in LSU's Pete Maravich Assembly Center.

Howell, a sales representative in Orlando, Fla., started working on the project six weeks ago. She said 30 to 40 former Lady Tigers have pledged money to the project, which will include photos, quotes and a list of Gunter's accomplishments.

"The last couple of years the alumni players have really tried to be involved in the program," Howell said. "This is important to us because we were all coached by coach Gunter for four years."

"We want her life, her message and everything she accomplished to be remembered."

"Personally, I guess I'm still a little in shock. Carla called and told me this morning. The last year things have been so up and down. She (Gunter) would have bad times, but then she would get back to where she was doing well."

Howell said she will always cherish her last conversation with Gunter about three weeks ago. "She got on the phone and said, 'I'm not feeling too good, but I wanted to get on the phone and tell you I love you.' That was just her way," Howell said.

Another former player who spoke with Gunter in the weeks before she died was University High coach Bonita Branch Johnson, who transferred from Stephen F. Austin to LSU when Gunter came to Baton Rouge in 1982.

"I'll always remember her shaking her head saying, 'Bo, do what you do best.' And for me that was defense," Johnson said. "Once I did what she wanted me to do — focus on defense — I became a better player."

"She's told my daughter, 'You'll never be the defensive player your mother was.' You don't

forget that."

Johnson said the retirement tribute held for Gunter at LSU last summer was both appropriate and timely because it gave Gunter a chance to see how colleagues and her former players felt about her.

One of the first phone calls Johnson made after learning of Gunter's death was to Pam Crawford, an All-American player at Stephen F. Austin, who played one year there for Gunter.

Now a coach at Houston's Clearbrook High, Crawford was a high school teammate of Johnson's at DeRidder High.

Crawford said she actually got two calls simultaneously, one from Johnson and another from her first cousin, former LSU men's player and assistant coach Johnny Jones, now the head men's basketball coach at the University of North Texas.

"Bonita was calling to tell me about coach Gunter and so was Johnny," Crawford said. "They both knew how important she was to me."

"I know now everybody is talking about coach Gunter and LSU. But before there was LSU there was the AIAW and Stephen F. Austin. She (Gunter) was one of the great coaches out there."

"Everything I've done, I've done because she gave me a chance to play college basketball. When we played a home game there were always two standing ovations. One for us and one for her. I'll always remember that."

Starkey also adds his remembrance.

"I can sum it up this way, I'm going to miss her a great deal," he said. "I'm thankful for the time I had with her."

"Working with Sue Gunter made me a better coach. But more importantly, it made me a better person."